Stepping up to Matike Mai by Catherine Delahunty

by **Catherine Delahunty** | Mar 27, 2022 | **2** | 5 min read

https://e-tangata.co.nz/comment-and-analysis/stepping-up-to-matike-mai/

Matike Mai Aotearoa Rangatahi, at Waitangi, February 2015.

There's no good reason for any of us to be applauding the way power is shared in Aotearoa — especially in view of what was agreed at Waitangi in 1840, and especially given how so many Māori have fared since then.
Fortunately, the injustice, unfairness and inefficiencies have been a frequent focus for some of our leaders including leading thinkers, most notably Moana Jackson and Margaret Mutu.
That focus has been particularly powerful and clear-sighted since an independent Māori group delivered its Matike Mai report on constitutional transformation in 2016, which they've followed up with more discussions since then.

Transformation is a beautiful word. "Constitution" is not such a beautiful word. It's a western and Westminster kind of word, and a lawyer kind of word.
There's nothing wrong with Westminster words in Westminster, but that's not where we are. There's nothing wrong with law or lore if it's made by and for the people and it's built on agreed values — but that, also, is not where we are.

Last weekend, I listened to the kōrero of Professor Mutu on *Matike Mai,* in the course of the webinar series “Te Tiriti Futures”. Her wonderfully clear presentation described the huge collective process many tangata whenua took part in to create a vision for a different set of arrangements for making decisions in Aotearoa. It was also a challenge to the rest of us to step up and bring our own vision.

Matike Mai is based on the transformation of the current state for the benefit of all, and to finally honour te Tiriti. But, to my surprise, when I read it and heard people describe it, the ideas were not legal — they were human.

You don’t have to be either a lawyer or a Māori language scholar to understand what the hundreds of hui came up with as *Matike Mai* was being developed.

As Dr Moana Jackson constantly reminds us, change comes by making acts of imagination. A million voices can tell us that we can’t change the current unjust system. But Moana’s call has always been to set aside the limits to our thinking and ask ourselves how we wish to make decisions and share power.

The call of *Matike Mai* starts with recognising He Whakaputanga (the parent document) which asserted the absolute authority of the hapū of this country in 1835. It was a message to the world and their trading partners that this country was, and is, a Māori country.

Te Tiriti (the child document) affirmed the parent authority and allowed England to establish a governor over *their* people, within a Māori country.

The rest is the history which the Crown hasn’t quite got around to teaching throughout our schools.

Matike Mai is a commitment to human values such as the value of place and belonging, of community, of tikanga, and of balance. It speaks of building structures for finding ways through conflict, rather through trying to beat your adversary.

But the equally powerful call is to tauiwi, including the Pākehā, to step up and express our collective values and how we would see transformation, based on what we believe to be good and fair to all.

In considering such a response, I can only reflect on my own people, the Pākehā, and, when I do, it’s somewhat alarming.

My first thought is: *“Crikey! The ‘us’ culture has called out the ‘me’ culture.”* Not with the gunboats, swords, germs, and courts that our ancestors used to attack them, but with a generous and strong act of imagination.

So, what can we as tangata Tiriti do? Well, we're going to have to help each other with this challenge and not rely on tangata whenua to do all the work.

I panicked in the dead of night and then made a list of what not to do.

1. *Don't turn to Māori and ask what we should do.*
2. *Don't expect Parliament to lead this.*
3. *Don't imagine that each individual needs to find an individual answer.*
4. *Don't ask the "majority" to vote on this.*
5. *Don't underestimate our people — but don't imagine this will be a smooth path.*

There are many cultures living in Aotearoa today who know all about racism and colonisation from their home countries — and what they might say about *Matike Mai* belongs to them. But what will Pākehā say?

Pākehā culture faces some barriers to stepping up to *Matike Mai*. One barrier is the numbers of us still pretending we are not a visible group holding on to power. I don't know who we think we are, but our refusal to see what everyone else who lives alongside us can see, is positively ridiculous.

We keep saying our nationality is our ethnicity: New Zealander/Kiwi. We want nationality to define who we are so that we don't have to answer the painful questions about colonisation and its ongoing benefits for us.

Apparently, we have no special foods, no birth/death rituals, no ways to welcome guests, no unique behaviours.

Apparently, the best we can do is borrow haka and waiata when we're overseas because we've declared ourselves empty of culture. To "take without respect" has become a marker of our behaviour.

I have this conversation with students over and over about who we are and how we were Europeans but now we are a different culture. We live by right of te Tiriti, a relationship-based identity. But I can see from some people's faces that they still think Pākehā is a derogatory word and that te Tiriti is a "Māori issue".

Another barrier is our distance from the villages where we all originally come from.

We've been geographically and socially-distanced from our ancestors for so long that we've convinced ourselves that family tree research is a hobby, not a vital unravelling of our true inheritance — the good, the bad and the ugly.

This refusal of ours leads to another refusal showing little respect for the whakapapa and whenua-based culture whose lands and rights have been stolen.
Feeling entitled to ignore painful truth holds us back from the only conversation which will heal this country.

But these barriers are not all we are capable of. Hence another list.
1. *Dig deep together. Recognise and name our positive values.*
2. *Make spaces where we can help each other respond to the Matike Mai vision.*
3. *Let go of control.*
4. *Own this history and design something better for a negotiated future.*
5. *Imagine how, as tangata Tiriti, we could start to negotiate with tangata whenua.*

“Fat chance,” I hear you say. But that’s the voice of those who are either benefiting from current injustice or hurt by the barriers to transformation. And, yes, there are people actively campaigning against *He Puapua* — the plan to implement the UN document upholding indigenous rights — and *Matike Mai.* They’re seeking to fire up fear and racism — and they will succeed with some of us.
But we can call on other parts of us: the adventurous and the imaginative. We can build an “us” so that tangata whenua have someone to sit down with in good faith, as was the intent in 1840 on February 6.
The image designed by the rangatahi on the front of the *Matike Mai* report is not an image that excludes possibilities. It takes us back to the first value identified by the *Matike Mai* rangatahi hui led by Veronica Tawhai. The first value of their generation was recognising and protecting Papatūānuku and Ranginui.
It’s their generation, and their love of the earth and right relationships, that will take us forward. Can we step up to follow them, bringing with us all that is good in us?
The chrysalis gets tight and painful. Transformation awaits.

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